

# Use it or Lose it II

## More Activities for Letting Children Use English With Some Ideas to Help You Develop More

### 幼稚園の教室で、子どもが英語を使う機会を与える II

Michael Brinkman

マイケル ブリンクマン

**Abstract:** Three more teaching sequences/activities for kindergarten/lower elementary school students are detailed. The first two activities include examples of providing a chance for students to guess the meaning, culminating in a game/activity, and provide a structure for students to interact with each other in English in a fun way. The third activity provides a plan for teaching phonics, with an opportunity for students to be involved with making teaching materials.

幼稚園・小学校低学年で試みた三つの具体的な英語アクティビティを詳述する。それぞれの特徴は生徒たちの推測力と問題解決力を養成すること、そしてクラスで使う教材をクラスで創作する機会を与えることである。

### Introduction

Continuing the theme of my last paper, I would like to introduce three more activities that I have developed and used for Kindergarten English classes. One is a game with opportunities for creating a need for students to think about how to communicate, and to use what they learn to play a game. The game is designed to be fairly resilient with regards

to mischievous boys, with opportunities to maintain student interest with some pranks. It provides an example of a game configured to provide an opportunity for the students to solve problems using English.

The second activity is also a game, a very physically active one. Again, the theme is creating a situation for students to use some high-frequency English. It was designed to be safe, even if the students get excited.

The third activity is a class-produced phonics chart, color laser printed and laminated, with a copy for each student. By involving the students in the chart, it is hoped that the chart will be a more meaningful study aid. The personalization of having students' pictures on the phonics chart increases the incentive to keep it. The weekly repetition of typical concrete examples of phonics will give students a 'peg' to use when sounding out words at a later time. Unsolicited parental feedback of kindergarten graduates indicates that it is helpful in at least the lower elementary grades.

## 1. Do You Have My Key?

Many kindergarten and primary school level textbooks include "Do you have..." in the syllabus/curriculum. The question itself suggests a game, and various simple games can be found in various teacher's books. Over time, to maximize learning opportunities and student engagement, I developed this module to have students discover how to use "Do you have ~ ~?" This activity module could be taught after Do you like ~ ~?, and the two phrases will provide two distinct examples of the same sentence pattern, which will help students understand where to substitute verbs into the pattern at a later time<sup>i</sup>, when they are ready.

Some teacher's books suggest an activity in which the children sit in a circle and someone hides an object, and someone in the middle has to close their eyes while the other students decide who holds it etc., and then has to open their eyes and try to guess who has it. In my early English teacher years, using the provided textbook and getting low engagement from the students, I hit on the idea of using a key. I told them it was my house key, and I needed it to get back into my house after I finished class. I would give it to a rowdy boy, then I would go out of the room for a few minutes, and then come back in and ask a few other boys, then finally the original boy, "Do you have my key?", and eventually they would

understand and we could play a game. It was easy to create a story/situation using simple words, gestures and quick whiteboard sketches, dramatizing the importance of the key. Even the rowdy boys loved to play. (caution: don't use a key that you actually need). When asking who has the key, there is obviously no guarantee that anybody has the key, especially if there is a window in the classroom that opens to the outside. Additionally, there is no easy way to check that the student asked doesn't actually have the key even if she says no. They might be playing a joke on me, which I certainly have no right to complain about, or, more seriously, they might not understand the meaning of the question.

To address this, my next development was to thread a long string through the eye of the key, and tie it into a loop as big as the circle of students. I would have the students sit down in a circle, and I would sit in the middle and have all the students hold the string with two hands. Then I would start to ask the students, "Do you have my key". If they said "no", then I asked and gestured for them to open their hands and show me the string. This way, I could check their understanding easily (without precluding jokes, see later).

After finding who had the key, I would ask them, "One more time?", and of course they wanted to, so I would tell them to "Pass the key around" and show them what I meant, while making it obvious that I was watching where the key went. This of course **created a need** for them to get me to close my eyes, or the game is no longer interesting. I left the students to their own devices, and different children would try some sort of gestures, or say "eyes" and gesture to close them or occasionally a student would use their fingers to try to physically close my eyes. As a prompt, I might mime opening and closing a book or a door to help jog their memory. In any case, if no one could come up with something that works, eventually I would help them to say "Close your eyes." and they could pass the key around. After a few seconds I would ask, "Are you ready?" until they were, and then I would keep my eyes closed and point where there were no people, and ask "Do you have my key?" to the ceiling. Eventually someone would come up with "Open your eyes", and we could continue normally. After modeling the activity this way, I would ask for a volunteer to sit in the middle of the circle, and repeat the game. To avoid placing too high a demand on the brave volunteer (and reducing eagerness to volunteer next time you need one) it is necessary to provide support. To support the student in the middle, I generally ask the whole group what

the person in the middle is supposed to say, and when nobody can come up with it (not surprising, since they've just been introduced to it), the volunteer in the middle can realize that it's OK that he doesn't know, because nobody knows, and everybody becomes ready to listen carefully because it's pretty obvious that the game won't happen if nobody knows what to say. I have the students repeat, "Do you have my key?", and (if it looks like it would be too much of a load for the students to remember how to do it) I tell the child in the middle to close his eyes if he hasn't already done so, and we begin the game.

After child one finds the key, I ask for another volunteer and repeat the process for another round. Before each round, I make sure to have the whole circle repeat the target sentence, relevant especially for the child who has to use it in 15 seconds, but also for the rest of the students, who will need it when it is their turn, or if they have already gone, perhaps next week.

Generally all the kids want to have a turn, which would take a long time in a big circle, and would be much longer than most children's attention span, especially once their turn is finished. So, with the help of the homeroom teacher, and an assistant if available, we break up into groups. If you are short on help, you could try a few student led groups, and try to keep an eye on each group. Many chances for the students to practice the target phrase is important. At first I have them repeat after me before each round, but gradually have the students say it from memory, without my example. It is a good chance for the stronger students to help the weaker, and in so doing both are benefitted.

If the activity looks like it will drag on too long, it can be separated into girls this week, boys next, or something like that. In any case, playing the game on a few separate occasions leads to increased retention through simple spaced repetition.

### 1.1 Variations to Keep the Game Fresh

Using pranks or jokes breaks up routine and hopefully gives students something memorable to associate the language with.<sup>ii</sup> If it is appropriate for your class, here is one idea. Usually the second day that we play this game, after a few students have gone and everyone has remembered the target phrase and how to play, I make sure a fairly resilient student goes in the middle, and I join the students holding the string. I make sure I get the

key, and while the student in the middle is looking and asking somewhere else, I tuck the key into my sock and make it look like the string is just casually placed on my foot. When the student in the middle is checking around me, I ‘casually’ let go of the string for a moment and grab it back like it slipped and I don’t want the student in the middle to see that I don’t have it. He will assume that I don’t have it and won’t even ask me, but when he has asked every other member but me, he will get very confused and finally I can dramatically pull the key out of my sock.

One more trick is to have all the students pass the key around and to pretend to pass the key around while he is guessing, so the middle student has to deal with multiple red herrings and a continuously changing scenario. (Similar to life). Don’t pick a student who panics easily and don’t let it go on too long!

## 1.2 Extensions

Extensions to this activity include using it at lunch, either with the “I have . . .” form, or trying to guess what students have for lunch (assuming there is no school lunch), or having them guess a snack that you have in a paper bag. If school policy allows, bring enough for everyone, and after lunch use with “May I have a (Pretzel)?” This provides another chunk of language with some similarities to what they were using (have), and some differences, useful for when they start thinking about how language works.

## 2. ‘I’m Sorry’ Game

This is a game I developed while on the train to work, after realizing that I had forgotten something necessary for what I had planned. It worked so well, I’ve been using it for over ten years. It also served to illustrate to myself that simple is best.

I think that this activity is successful because it so clearly links a situation with appropriate English, in the form of a simple, rather physical little game suited for young learners. The challenge and fun of a physical game links to the satisfaction of using English competently in a (pseudo) real-life situation which was created by the game itself. The success of this activity and others like it has influenced how I think about presenting and teaching. One of my primary goals when thinking of how to teach something is to find a way

to create a situation, and then help students to develop the language to deal with that situation. David Paul, founder of David English House, has a similar approach,<sup>iii</sup> as developed in many of his books.

The target language is “I’m sorry” or “Sorry”, and “That’s OK”. It is possible to introduce the target with either a very simple skit with the homeroom teacher, asking the students what they heard, both having them guess the meaning in Japanese and trying to repeat the English. (Of course repeating the skit as many times as necessary.)

Or, I generally start this lesson/introduce the target by reviewing something else, and ‘accidentally’ stepping on someone’s foot. (I feign shock, and say “I’m sorry” a few times, and continue with the review, stepping on a foot in a different area, repeating the process until everyone has seen it reasonably up-close. Next, if the students haven’t started to try already, I have a student step on my foot, by grabbing a nearby foot and plunking it down on my foot. (Obviously this will work better when teacher and students are all sitting down.) Then I feign shock and anger, until someone gets the idea to say “I’m sorry”, then I come back with “That’s OK”, and look happy again. Repeat that a few times, elicit “I’m sorry” by stepping on someone’s foot and ‘forgetting’ what to say, looking to the class for help. Help students develop fluency with some call and response, (a good chance to stress the ‘th’ sound) and then tell everyone it’s game time, and have them walk on their hands and feet, facing upward (crab walk). Next, try to step on someone’s foot. If successful, say “I’m sorry.” and wait for “That’s ok.” If they aren’t ready yet, practice a few more times. Use gestures to ensure that the students know that they may not stand up, not to stamp hard (raise your foot high, pretending to stamp very hard, and ask ‘OK?’), and that they have to finish the exchange before they can move on.

The crab walk position slows the game down, and makes it difficult to put too much power into stamping on people’s feet, even if they get excited. And, it is actually quite a challenge to walk that way! Good exercise for teachers and students.

After demonstrating the game, have the students join in, trying to stamp other people’s feet, and keep people from stamping their own feet. Make sure to interact with each student at least once. It is worthwhile to coach any teachers who will be helping you so that they also can provide a good example of the language to the children too. Of course, end up the

game while it is still fun, so they will be excited next time you play too.

### 3. Class Derived Phonics Chart

Phonics recognition is of course essential for reading. There are many great ways to teach phonics. As one example, I provide an outline of my method, but the inventive portion is the class derived phonics chart. Research shows that personalizing the subject matter helps students to learn, and this project personalizes the learning in two ways. One way is that the students themselves think up the words to put on the chart, and the other way is that their names and photographs are put on the chart, and reviewed every week at the start of class.

#### 3.1 An Example Program for Year One of a Two Year Phonics Program

About halfway through the school year in English time in kindergarten classes for three-year-olds, we start to sing the alphabet song every week as a part of the class opening routine. The alphabet and phonics are quite abstract, and therefore are best taught a little at a time, with many repetitions. This makes them a good addition to the opening routine. After a few weeks (of once a week classes), when they are a bit familiar with it, I start having them repeat the letter names after me. Some would argue that the students don't need to know the letter names so early, and I agree, but it is a good chance to experiment and play with the sounds, and to start to notice differences and similarities between written letters (discussed later). Usually I say each letter in a different way, varying intonation, speed, emotion, and volume, and having the children try to copy me. For example, I usually say 'Q' in a rising intonation, like a question. For 'R' (sounds like 'are') I usually use falling intonation, like a yes/no question. Some letters I say like I'm angry, some up-then-down intonation, some in a high voice, some in a low voice, some fast, some slow, some in a resigned voice, loud voice, soft voice, or whatever I can think of. The zanier the more they will remember!

Fun/important/challenging letters for sound/pronunciation include 'L' (stress the tongue strongly contacting the roof of the mouth, and lips flared, versus 'R' with only the sides of the tongue weakly touching the roof of the mouth, and the mouth a bit puckered, as for a

kiss. Other chances for a strong image are contrasting ‘B’ and ‘P’ sounds. I use a tissue held near my lips. When I say ‘B’ the tissue hardly moves, but when I say the ‘P’, I make sure to give it a good strong puff of air to send the tissue flying. I let a few kids try it too. The first time generally gets a strong reaction, which hopefully helps them remember. ‘M’ and ‘N’ are also good to focus on. I ask the kids if my mouth is open or closed after modelling those two letters (one at a time), and when having the kids repeat, I make sure their mouths are in the correct configuration. ‘V’ is a fun one too, exaggerate biting the lip and tell them if it tickles, they’re doing it right. ‘Z’ is a good chance to have everyone buzz around like a bumble bee. ‘T’ is not a phoneme in Japanese, check to make sure they are not saying ‘CHI’, the closest sound in Japanese. There may be other things to check in languages other than Japanese. Don’t try to cover these all these in one class!

To help the kinesthetic learners stay focused to the end, I generally start making the letter shapes with my arms/hands from T to Y, and trace a big ‘Z’ in the air. The children don’t need to do it, but they are welcome to.

After all that has been introduced, I start ‘Air Writing’, which is simply using your finger to “write” in the air. Every class I do four letters, in order. I usually start with capital letters, because there are no letters with ‘basements’. First I point at the first letter of the day’s group, and ask what letter it is, and hopefully someone can answer. If they can’t, singing the alphabet song until one letter before might help them to remember. Next, I get all the kids to stick out their pointer fingers, and I trace with my finger on the chart, with kids copying me in the air. Then we write a huge letter in the air, everyone as large as they can. You could draw it fast or slow, or play with writing the letter, for example writing too many humps on an ‘m’ or having the students tell you when to stop when air-writing the letter ‘c’. Variation is the key to keeping them on their toes. Finally I trace it on the chart again with my finger and we continue on to the next, repeating the process. Every week we do four letters (Y&Z week, only two). Then we repeat with small letters. In the first week, I ask the students what the difference is between ‘b’ and ‘d’, and if there are any other similar letters (the students will hopefully notice ‘a’, ‘p’ and ‘q’, and ‘g’) (Make sure the chart has a handwritten ‘a’, not a general print ‘a’ (see chart one).

In the second week of small letters, we discover ‘basement letters’. To help students



understand those, I hold a (clear) straightedge/ruler along the bottoms of ‘g’ and its neighbors for example, helping them to discover that a part goes below the other letters. To help remember those, we use a pretend jackhammer noise/action to drill into the floor for the bottoms of g, j, p, q and y.

Books usually use fonts where ‘a’ and ‘g’ (font: Century) are different from handwriting style, for example, (font: *Comic Sans MS*) ‘a’ and ‘g’.

Chart 1. Example Print Types.

With smaller classes, we might use dollar store foam alphabet puzzles, one per student, for them to learn about the letters by manipulating them. Note that most commercially available products do not use a handwritten font.

### 3.2 Second year

With students one grade up, we start the class with the Matsuka Phonics Institute phonics song.<sup>iv</sup> I have made my own set of flashcards to go along with the song, however commercial products are available. There are other phonics songs available commercially and on the internet<sup>v</sup>. At first the phonics song is just part of the routine, like the year before. After a semester (3.5 months) of singing the phonics song with flashcards, the children will know an example word containing the sound for each letter. The next step is to help the students come up with other words starting with the same sound. Every week in semester 2 we take up four letters, one letter at a time, brainstorming words starting with the letter sound. I accept English or Japanese words, and ‘c’ words, ‘k’ words, and ‘q’ words start with the same sound and so are interchangeable at this stage of the project. The main goal at this stage is that children can listen and compare the initial sounds to the words from the song and decide if it is the same by themselves. If someone suggests a word that doesn’t match the initial pronunciation of the letter in question, for example ‘c’, I say the song letter sound and sample word e.g. c-c-c cow, (preceded by the ‘k’ /hard c sound), the word they suggested preceded by its first sound, and the c-c-cow example again. After I stress the initial sounds for them, usually the student can recognize that the word doesn’t match, and they can try to think of another word.

It’s interesting to see some of the mistakes they make, for example suggesting the Japanese word for the original example word/picture, or suggesting other examples of things

in the same category, for example other kinds of animals for letter ‘c’ when ‘cow’ was the original example. Often there is some sort of logic behind their choice.

After the students have produced a number of words that start with the target sound, if there is a student whose name starts with the target sound, and the students haven’t noticed yet, I tell them that someone’s name starts with this letter. It may take a few guesses, but it is exciting to see their faces light up when they understand. (Definitely prepare an alphabetical class list in advance so you don’t forget anyone.)

Once there is an English word or two that starts with the target letter (don’t pick one that has the same sound, but a different letter) and that is representable by some sort of picture, write down the class choice (vote as necessary) and move on to the next letter.

Either after doing this for each letter of the alphabet, or part way through, start collecting pictures for the letters. I usually use the internet, searching images with Google and saving the images to my computer. It is also possible to draw your own pictures for the artistically inclined. For the letters that start children’s names, I use a camera to take pictures of the students. If there are multiple student names starting with the same letter I take group shots. Next, I prepare a word processor document with one page for each letter, landscape orientation. In a large font, put a capital letter and a small letter. Select a font in which g, j, p, and q, clearly extend below other letters and that is similar to handwritten, i.e, a and g should be simple, as per the discussion above. If you can find one, a font that has penmanship guides might also be useful.

It is also useful for the children to understand that some of the letter sounds are similar to the letter names, and some are not. The letters with sounds that are similar to the letter names I color black or green, and letters that have less relation to their sounds are red (e.g. c, g, h, and that wacky w). Vowels I color blue. If there are any children’s names starting with Ch or Sh I make a page for them as well. There is room for 28 pages, so if there is room a title page is nice as well. See appendix one for a sample. (Names have been changed and faces blurred to protect student privacy)

When all the pages are complete, I make a set of A5 size flashcards. These are for classroom use, and for the remaining classes of kindergarten, we sing the phonics song with the new vocab from these new cards, although we play the unchanged CD track softly to

provide timing and tone for singing. Sometimes the new words don't exactly match the beat, especially when multiple children's names need to be squeezed into a short time, but that is part of the fun. Names that start with ch or sh are spoken at the end after the song is finished.

Near the end of the students' time at kindergarten, I make an alphabet/phonics chart for each student. I print a color copy on A3 paper, and on the back side, there is a summary/quick reference of some of the highlights of the English they have learned. After laminating, it makes a nice graduation gift, with everyone's picture on it, and some English I hope they can use at home.

I make the phonics chart with the 'print multiple pages on one page' setting. Some printers have that option in the printer driver, and so do some word processors. I usually use OpenOffice, (a widely used free word processor, mostly compatible with Word). Just select 'custom', then 4 by 7, and print. 28 pages will be printed on one sheet, making a nice chart. It is better if you have access to an A3 color laser printer. It is a lot of work to find fonts and set things up the first time, but the second time you can just change the pictures and words quite quickly. The biggest danger is getting sidetracked while surfing for interesting images. If there is an interesting image not related to the current project, save it and move on. Having a few collections of interesting files can be useful in one class or another.

Once the students are familiar with the basic phonics sounds, I introduce consonant/vowel/consonant words at the kindergarten. Words such as 'ten', 'cat', 'red', or even 'jump', are simple and familiar enough that if the phonics cards for the letters of the word are laid out in order by the word on the board, someone will probably be able to figure out what it says, without teacher input. Some of the children catch on and get excited by this, but at the kindergarten level, some students are probably not quite ready for it. For this reason, I don't spend a lot of time on reading in the regular classes at kindergarten. However, it is good for the students who are not yet quite ready to read to see the excitement of other students figuring out, by themselves, how the sounds of the letters join to form words, and starting to read. There is no direct pressure for them to read, but seeing that some of their peers can figure it out without teacher help, and also seeing the excitement this generates for some students, will hopefully be a powerful stimulus and an encouragement in the future, for

when it will be required.

I have had very good results with this method, and those students who continue with me into grade school are well prepared to learn how to read more difficult material, especially once they know the ch, sh, th, and ph sounds, and ‘magic e’ (ie for example, start with ‘short a’ word ‘cap’. Add ‘e’ onto the end and the ‘e’ “casts a spell” on the ‘a’, making the ‘a’ say its own name (long vowel sound)). By using these rules, the students can, with teacher support, start reading the dialogues in the textbooks. They are supported by the teacher feedback, but also by the fact that the textbook dialogues are often similar to some things they have learned, and the picture gives a context. At this stage students are often very motivated, but still need lots of help. Figuring out one very short dialogue is very exciting, but also quite tiring. Asking them to do one more in the same class may lead to greatly reduced motivation. By providing appropriate weekly exposure/challenges, children can almost teach themselves how to read, once they know the basics of phonics.

## Conclusion

These three activities have been useful for my students. I hope they are useful to you as complete plans for some playful and engaging learning activities, but I also hope that they are useful on a deeper level as examples of how to prepare a situation where students can see and hear target English in use with the goal of having them guess what it means, and also of creating a ‘problem’ for students to solve with English (i.e. creating a need), and also of planning an activity where they can use it in some sort of context. Additionally I hope that the suggestions of places where students can help each other are instructive as well.

Appendix 1. Sample Phonics Chart

Aa Akira



Bb balloon



Cc Conny



Dd donut



Ee elephant



Ff fruit



Gg green



Hh Harumi Hana



Ii ice cream



Jj Japan



Kk Kotaro



Ll Lego



Mm Miho Maikeru



Nn Niwa  
Natsumi



Oo olive



Pp

pants



Qq question



Rr

ring



Ss Sawa Sachi  
Satoshi Seiko Seina



Tt

Taha



Uu up



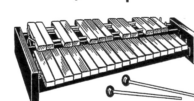
Vv vanilla



Ww

wash

Xx xylophone



*The Phonics  
Song*

Yy Mrs. Yanagida



Zz zipper



Shane Sh unsuke



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<sup>i</sup> Read, Carol. *500 Activities for the Primary Classroom*. Oxford: Macmillan Education, 2007, p 86.

<sup>ii</sup> Paul, David. *Teaching English to Children in Asia*. Hong Kong: Pearson Longman Asia ELT, 2003. Print. P. 18.

<sup>iii</sup> Paul, David. *Songs and Games for Children*. Oxford: Macmillan Heinemann English Language Teaching, 1996. Print. P.7.

<sup>iv</sup> Matsuka, Yoko. *Songs and Chants MPI Best Selection*. Japan: MPI, 2000. CD.

<sup>v</sup> One possible source would be to search for “Phonics Song” on Youtube.